

The Milk Can
Louisquisset Turnpike, Route 146
~~Lincoln~~ Saylesville Vicinity
Providence County
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-384

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THE MILK CAN

HABS No. RI-384

Location: Louisquisset Turnpike (R.I. 146)
~~Lincoln~~ (Providence County), Rhode Island
Saylesville Vicinity

Present Owner: R.I. Department of Transportation

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: NA

Significance: The Milk Can is significant for its exemplification of aspects of early twentieth century commercial and transportation history. It is a characteristic example of a distinctive and fast-disappearing phase of the first period of automobile-oriented commerce. The Milk Can represents the earliest period of snack food merchandising. Located on a major highway, it was designed to act as a "sign," an immediate, eye-catching attraction to auto travelers on the Louisquisset Pike. The heyday of such mimetic architecture was in the 1920s and 1930s, and examples are now rare.

The Milk Can's flamboyant form is a good expression of the retailing imperatives of its decade. Unlike the highway-oriented chain fast-food outlets of today, whose proprietors can rely upon nation-wide promotion and advertising to gain the recognition and attention of travelers, the Milk Can's owner, who built in an era of individual entrepreneurship, required a structure which could demand the motorist's notice, immediately focus his attention, and act as an advertisement for itself.

The Milk Can is significant as a reminder of the early decades of auto travel when Americans took to the highway with a sense of excitement and new-found mobility, as a singular example of roadside vernacular architecture (literally a "sign of its time"), and for its ability to illustrate some important aspects of Lincoln's early twentieth century history.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: c. 1931 (deeds, interview with Joseph Mariani).
2. Architect: Unknown; built for Charles Plante.
3. Original and subsequent owners: References to the chain of title to the land upon which the Milk Can stands are in the Town Clerk's Office, Lincoln Town Hall, Old River Road, Lincoln, Rhode Island.

- 1931 Deed, recorded in Book 35, page 431.
Eugenie Baudet to Charles Plante.
- 1947 Deed, recorded in Book 54, page 452.
Charles Plante to Joseph and Helen
Mariani.

- 4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown.
- 5. Original plans and construction: Not located.
- 6. Alterations and additions:
 - Canopy (see 11B5), c. 1950
 - Kitchen ell (see 11A1), c. 1950
 - Patio Area (see 11B5), c. 1960
- B. Historical Context: The Milk Can illustrates several important aspects of Lincoln's recent history - the prevalence of the automobile by the 1930s, the development of major highways in the town, and the increasing importance of commercial "strips" serving an auto-oriented suburban community and supplementing the commerce of the villages.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the automobile reshaped Lincoln's orientation which, until then, consisted of a matrix of small manufacturing villages, separated by expansive farmlands and connected by a few roads (such as the north-south Louisquisset Pike, first opened in 1807). The transportation revolution signalled by the automobile's omnipresence required the upgrading of older highways, like Louisquisset Pike, and the construction of new ones. These highways modified the landscape of the town and overlaid a linear development pattern on top of the older, closer pattern of villages. Such changes continue to alter the face of Lincoln, stimulating industrial and residential growth, all essentially of a suburban character, as the highways have shortened the distance between Lincoln and the Providence metropolitan area.

In addition, major highways spurred commercial development along their lengths. On the Louisquisset Pike, rebuilt for the automobile in 1928-1929, and linking the industrial centers of Providence and Woonsocket, businesses designed to serve auto travelers are interspersed among older houses which existed along the old turnpike. Commercial development on Louisquisset Pike since its widening and upgrading is scattered and motley and, for the most part, unexceptional. The Milk Can is the only well preserved, historically and architecturally noteworthy component of that commercial strip. Indeed, it is the most remarkable historic structure of its type in the state.

Part II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General statement:

- 1. Architectural Character: The Milk Can is an ice-cream store, built in the shape of a daryman's cream can. The lower level is drum-shaped and is topped by a conical section which, in

turn, is capped by another, smaller drum-shaped section. The whole is surmounted by a "cap;" a "handle" extends out from just below the cap to the side of the structure. A small, 1-story kitchen ell (c. 1950) is set to the south of the Milk Can. An adjacent cottage was the residence of the owner and also contained a smoking room and rest rooms for store patrons.

2. Conditions of fabric: Fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 32' 6" high; 16' in diameter; lower drum 18' 6" high.
2. Foundation: The Milk Can is set directly on the ground and is surrounded by an asphalt apron.
3. Walls: Rough sheathing composed of 1" x 3"s, set on angle of 45° from the vertical wrapping around the form; on lower level beaded broad siding applied over 1" x 3"s.
4. Structural system framing: Lower drum framed with 2" x 4" studs; positioned radially around the circumference; sill and plate are 2" x 6" members, cut circularly. Bracing above lower drum positioned on a chord between the studs. In the conical section, studs set as in lower drum, but the plates are sectional; double plate where conical section joins lower drum. Upper drum framed as lower drum. Roof framed with 2" x 4"s.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: Circular canopy above first level, suspended by iron tie rods bolted through studs at second level; probably constructed c. 1950. Also, shed-roofed patio cover, open-sided, on the west side; covered with corrugated fiberglass sheets; probably constructed c. 1960.
6. Chimneys: None.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Plain wood door, glazed; opens into kitchen wing.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Five pairs 6/1 double-hung sash windows at lower level; shelves at sill level on exterior; originally light and air only, converted to service windows. Two original service windows with 3/1 DH sash.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Roof shaped as the "cap" or "lip" of cream can; framed with 2" x 4"s, roof and side of "cap" covered with galvanized tin over tongue-and-groove sheathing; tin now covered with tar.

- b. Cornice, eaves: None.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Ground level: The ground level is approximately 16' in diameter; a large freezer is set in the center of the space; around the perimeter of the room and below the windows, are soda fountain, sinks, serving counters, storage racks, and cash register. Kitchen ell contains compressors, refrigerator, grill, and tables. Upper levels used for storage.

2. Stairways: Hatchway in ground floor ceiling.

3. Flooring: On the ground level, flooring is unpainted wood. Second level has a full floor; third level is only partially floored.

4. Walls and ceiling finish: On the first floor, walls are finished with white-painted, narrow, matched boarding. Kitchen ell walls are unfinished and the studs left exposed. Walls on upper levels similarly unfinished.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: See 11B7a.
- b. Windows: See 11B7b.

6. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Lights: On ground level, 3, 3-bulbs fluorescent ceiling fixtures.

D. Site:

- 1. General setting and orientation: The Milk Can is set at the edge of Louisquisset Pike (Route 146), close to that highway's intersection with Interstate Route 295; surrounded by asphalt parking lot. East side of structure faces highway.
- 2. Outbuildings: Two small wood privies, extreme NW corner of parking lot.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: Not located.
- B. Early View: Aerial View, c. 1950, owned by Joseph Mariani.

C. Interviews: Interview with Joseph Mariani (owner 1947-197), notes on file at Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 150 Benefit Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02903.

D. Bibliography:

Land Evidence Records, Town of Lincoln.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: Charles Plante's son, (name unknown), who worked at the Milk Can (according to interview with Joseph Mariani), may live in Rhode Island; not yet located.

Prepared by: P. Kennedy
National Register Coordinator
R.I. Historical Preservation
Commission
April 30, 1983

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Milk Can is set near the interchange of R.I. Route 146 and Interstate Route 295; this interchange was partially constructed in the late 1960s and opened in the early 1970s. Plans for completion of the interchange, "R.I. Proj. 1-295-5(4)44, Route 146 Interchange," were formulated by the R.I. Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration in the mid-1970s; in consultation with the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, RIDOT-FHWA identified an impact on the Milk Can property. Pursuant to Executive Order 11593, RIDOT-FHWA and the RISHPO sought a determination of eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places for the Milk Can; the structure was declared eligible for the National Register in May 1978. In 1979, RIDOT filed its "Final Negative Declaration, Section 4(f), Statement" for the project; a Memorandum of Agreement (among RISHPO, FHWA, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation) was signed in February, 1979, outlining mitigation procedures for the negative impact of the project on the Milk Can. Among the mitigation procedures, RIDOT-FHWA will record the Milk Can to meet NAER Standards in its original location.